Removing gender barriers: promoting inclusion for trans and non-binary carers in fostering and adoption

Abstract
This paper offers a conceptually-informed analysis of fostering and adoption social work and argues for more consistent inclusion of trans and non-binary people. The conceptual frameworks through which we explore current policy and practice is set out to provide clarity about the ways in which we employ the concepts of trans, gender diversity and cisgenderism (a prejudicial ideology). We employ the notion of cisgenderism as a critical lens through which to overview fostering and adoption social work within the context of trans inclusion. Focus is turned to the existing literature relevant to trans parenting, trans-headed families and the field of fostering and adopting. We highlight significant knowledge gaps in this regard. We then argue that if fostering and adoption social work is to embody inclusive practice with trans people, a new culture must be embedded to promote collaborative working, enhance knowledge and improve service provision. The paper concludes by asserting that such an approach must be underpinned by an understanding, acceptance and appreciation of people who identify as trans and/or as non-binary.

Keywords: adoption, cisgenderism, fostering, LGBT, non-binary, trans

Introduction
This paper explores the relative silence that has surrounded the issue of and potential for trans people to be more consistently and effectively included within fostering and adoption social work in the UK. For clarity, fostering and adoption social work will refer to work done to recruit, assess and support adoptive parents and foster carers to provide substitute care up to age 18 years and beyond for those children who are unable to live with birth family members. Reviews of UK and international fostering and adoption social work have analysed the practices of recruitment, assessment and the support offered to marginalised groups, yet whilst lesbian and gay adopters and foster carers have been included (see Golombok *et al.,* 2014; Cosis-Brown *et al.,* 2015), the voices of trans people within adoption and fostering research have been neglected. This is not unusual as research with lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans (LGBT) communities frequently has the effect of subsuming and silencing trans voices (Biblarz & Savci, 2010; Rogers, 2016, 2017b).

In this paper, we explore the silence in relation to the workings of cisgenderism within adoption and fostering social work, encompassing within these discussions the similar and subsumed notion of gender normativity. The concept of cisgenderism refers to a prejudicial ideology (similar to racism and sexism) which incorporates the view that those individuals whose gender identity differs to that which was ascribed at birth, and defined by social conventions, are atypical and less valid (Ansara & Hegarty 2011, 2014; Rogers, 2017b). Gender normativity similarly refers to the social construction of binary gender, constituted by the categories of man/masculine and woman/feminine, as *normal* and any other gender identity as *abnormal* (Stryker & Aizura, 2013). It is also useful to note that heteronormativity (the positioning of heterosexual identities as the norm and all other sexual identities as deviant) has been extensively researched in relation to adoption and fostering over the past 20 years (Hicks, 2011), but gender normativity has not. A full discussion of the conceptual

framework pertaining to trans, gender diversity and cisgenderism is presented in the next section.

An analysis of the intersectionality of sexuality and gender at the confluence of fostering and adoption practice is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is important to highlight that approaching issues of sexuality and gender identity as overlapping and inseparable is problematic in advancing social work practice with trans people. Moreover, it has been acknowledged by writers in the field of lesbian and gay adoption fostering research that previous scholarship, which has taken this approach, has resulted in a lack of research focus exploring the unique challenges and assets that trans people have, both as a community and as individuals (Mallon, 2017; Hicks & McDermott, 2018). We do not argue that fostering and adoption social work is unique in terms of this neglect as it is well documented that trans communities face significant and frequent disregard, discrimination and marginalisation in all areas of social life (Veldorale-Griffin & Anderson Darling, 2016; Rogers, 2017a, 2017b). For example, trans people face higher rates of unemployment, workplace harassment, poorer mental and physical health (Grant *et al.,* 2011; Bocking *et al*., 2013; Bachmann & Gooch, 2018).

In recognition of the need to further understandings of how cisgenderism can impact on processes in all areas of social work, this paper contributes to an emerging body of literature pertaining to social care and trans people and offers a unique perspective in turning the lens towards fostering and adoption social work. We explore the extent to which the fields of fostering and adoption engage with and support trans people wishing to foster or adopt. In doing so, we posit that removing gender barriers in this field could improve practice for children as well as for the adults hoping to care for them, and, more specifically, address some of the well-reported challenges in fostering and adoption; for example, the enduring shortage of carers available to meet children's permanency needs (Brown, 2017).

The paper will begin with an overview of our conceptual framework, focusing on understandings of trans identity and the phenomenon of cisgenderism. This will help the reader to situate the remaining discussion within the context of contemporary debates about gender diversity and inclusion. It will also help the reader to make links in the next section which discusses the way in which cisgenderism operates within the social work profession. We then summarise the main findings contained in the literature on trans parenting and families before turning attention towards fostering and adopting social work exploring existing evidence pertaining to LGBT communities, noting the dearth of literature on trans people in this regard. An overview of the existing research, and the gaps thereof, will help to contextualise the issues of cisgenderism and implications for fostering and adoption social work. The paper will conclude by suggesting ways in which fostering and adoption social work can move towards more inclusive practice.

The conceptual framework: defining trans identities and cisgenderism

For decades, the academy has considered gender to be socially produced through practices and processes, such as socialisation, and the associated cultural regimes and norms underpinning such processes (Connell, 1987). These processes have been subject to analysis but mostly in relation to a model of gender as binary (man/woman) which hitherto has resulted in the silencing of people identifying outside of this dyad (Pershai, 2006). Yet, the

binary understanding of gender and power structures within a male-dominated hierarchy has been developed in recent years to include notions of gender as a multi-dimensional identity or characteristic (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Indeed, the diversity of gender and trans identity has more recently received greater attention (LGBT Foundation, 2017)

For brevity, 'trans' is employed as an umbrella term to describe a person whose self-identification in relation to gender is different to that which was assigned to them at birth. 'Cisgender' describes a person whose experience of gender identity aligns with the descriptor that was assigned to them at birth (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). The umbrella term 'trans' includes a wide range of identities including: trans male, trans female, transsexual woman, transsexual man, MtF, FtM, a woman or man with a transgender history (Bachmann & Gooch, 2018). Non-binary, genderqueer, queer, genderfluid, gender neutral, gender diverse, gender non-conforming and other terms may be used to describe a person whose gender does not conform to the man/woman binary (Sycamore, 2008; Bachmann & Gooch, 2018). We recognise a diversity of identities that sit across, along or outside of a gender spectrum and we strive not to homogenise or delimit the term 'trans'. As such, no restrictions will be applied to any term utilised in this paper, instead Serano's (2016) philosophical position will be taken; that experience of gender identity is personal and should not be reduced to physical presentation or a set of socially-dictated characteristics.

The concept of gender normativity relates to those social constructions of binary gender as 'normal', positioning any divergence from this as anomalous (Stryker & Aizura, 2013). This notion underpins our analysis as it places the most commonly represented social constructions of binary gender as *normal* (Stryker & Aizura, 2013). Within this normative conception, cisgender identities are positioned as natural and immutable, in that gender identity is fixed at birth and absolute, whereas trans identities are viewed as unnatural, deviant and other (Enke, 2012). As a framework that is useful to our analysis, 'cisgenderism', which integrates ideas of gender normativity refers to the view that differing from the gender ascribed to you at birth and defined by social conventions is less valid than a cisgender identity (Ansara & Hegarty, 2011, 2014). Cisgenderism operates at different levels as it can be intentional or unintentional. It can be present in a personal view, but it is also considered to have systemic traits and it is a prejudicial ideology akin to sexism and racism (Ansara & Hegarty, 2011, 2014; Rogers, 2017a, 2017b).

Theories of normativity in relation to sexual identity are also relevant to the analysis because sexuality and gender are often conflated and it can prove difficult to partition experience in terms of the two (Rogers and Ahmed, 2017). In a way comparable to gender normativity, heteronormativity is relevant too as it refers to the assumption of heterosexuality as the 'norm' and homosexuality as deviant (Hall, 2010). Similarly, heterosexism is the privileging of heterosexual identities and norms and the diminishment of homosexual identities including the failure to accept an aspect of sexuality being fluid or context-dependent (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). Examples of how heterosexism operates within adoption and fostering come from instances where applicants identifying as LGB undergo an assessment during which they are encouraged to assimilate and fit heteronormative templates to convince assessing social workers they meet suitability criteria (Hicks, 1998, 2000; Hall, 2010; Mallon, 2000, 2011).

Cisgenderism in social work education and practice

An important report by Hudson-Sharp in 2018 successfully bought into focus the paucity of extant knowledge of trans identity in relation to social work practice, highlighting that trans awareness is not routinely embedded within the pre- or post-qualifying curriculum in the education and training for social workers (Hudson-Sharp, 2018). Instead, issues pertaining to trans and trans identity have generally been overlooked or incorporated within a diffuse discussion of anti-discriminatory practice. This is critical as whilst there is a dearth of literature on adoption and fostering social work and trans awareness, existing work does illuminate the workings of gender normativity and cisgenderism to an extent. For instance, a US-based study exploring social workers' attitudes to adoption by LGBT people found more agreement with statements that children of trans adopters will experience more ridicule than those in lesbian or gay families (Kemper & Reynaga, 2015). There are no empirical studies that support this view. Similarly, in a UK-based study, social workers were more likely to agree that trans parents should undergo psychotherapy and that homosexual people are more suitable to adopt than trans people (Hudson-Sharp, 2018). These attitudes are consistent with cisgenderist assumptions that trans identities are less valid (Enke, 2012). Conversely, Kemper and Reynaga (2015) found conflicting norms as several respondents suggested that, overall, their attitudes toward LGBT adoption held that love, stability, safety and ability were more important than a person's identity.

To combat the frequent discrimination and exclusion experienced trans people, the LGBT Foundation (2017) and Stonewall's (Bachmann & Gooch, 2018) calls for equality and diversity training for all staff is supported further in a recent study which examined social care education (Hudson-Sharp, 2018). Educators, interviewed by Hudson-Sharp, all agreed that education and understanding of trans and gender diversity is currently lacking. Hudson-Sharp (2018: 5) did, however, find pockets of social work expertise where social workers had undergone self-directed study (although he found that trans awareness was seen as 'low priority due to low incidence'). There were reports of staff behaving in a prejudicial manner, making uninformed judgements about the acceptability of gender diversity and failing to recognise the impact that an unsupportive environment can have. Local authority staff spoke of there being phases of interest with regard to different minoritised groups, albeit this interest tended to shift in line with the cultural and political environment.

A further finding of Hudson-Sharp's (2018) study was that while there is some evidence of training on trans awareness, it is not routinely or widely available and, as such, the extent of most social workers' knowledge of gender identity was insufficient. This resulted in a service that was not 'good enough' for trans people and their families. A practice note offering guidance to UK social workers has been produced in response to this need (Brown et al., 2018). However, practice notes are only useful to those with an interest in the topic and to those who choose to access them. In this paper, we support Hudson-Sharp's (2018) assertion that for real and lasting change to improve the support and inclusion of trans people in social work, trans and gender diversity awareness must be meaningfully integrated in pre- and post-qualifying social work education.

Another study reported that awareness-raising effectively reduced discriminatory norms as Dugmore and Cocker (2008) found that social workers who attended just one eight-hour training session on LGBT issues were likely to then report more accepting beliefs. As noted

earlier, however, training provision, is inconsistent. It may also be inadequate as even where people do not hold overtly discriminatory views, there is still a widespread failure to acknowledge that gender and sexuality can be fluid and context-dependent (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). In fostering and adoption social work this can result in circumstances where prospective LGBT carers are expected to 'fit' heteronormative templates (Hicks, 1998; 2000; Hall, 2010; Mallon, 2000, 2011). There are also reports from the US that suggest trans and non-binary people have experienced cisgenderist responses from adoption and fostering social work staff that are either overt or take the form of micro-aggressions (Perry, 2017).

Hick's early analysis argues that research points to practices that result in the 'desexualising' and 'depoliticizing' of LGBT parents within adoption and fostering assessments; they are encouraged to moderate views and prove the care they can offer a sufficient substitute for a non-LGBT carer (Hicks, 2000). In this way, applicants are being encouraged to act in a way that fits with the expected normative characteristics associated with heterosexual couples; this is heteronormativity in operation. Such heteronormative influences are nuanced but serve to differentiate and disadvantage those who do not fit established norms, expressly, trans and non-binary people (Stryker, 2008; Sycamore, 2008).

Cisgenderism underpins widely held views and practices that seek to coerce trans people into gender normative roles (Rogers, 2017b). Inasmuch, to be accepted as a 'suitable' parent, one must fit in to the gender binary (Prosser, 1998). Hicks (2013) sums this up by arguing that it is not enough for social workers to have anti-oppressive views with regard to gender diversity as conformity and normativity are deeply embedded in the institutional discourses that dominate practice. This results in social workers being accountable and directed by a moral order that acts to uphold this dominant discourse. This is reflected in the modest but emerging body of work as existing evidence shows that trans people have poor experiences of social work in general (Hudson-Sharp, 2018).

Trans parenting and families

Scholarship pertaining to families headed by trans-identified parents is growing although for some time this remained a rather modest body of work which has been characterised by a notable bias; it has lacked specificity in relation to the experiences of adults and children in families where parents identify as non-binary. Typically, this research has inclined to emphasise health and transition issues (Williams & Freeman, 2007; Hines, 2007; Veldorale-Griffin & Anderson Darling, 2016) and within the autobiographical literature, the focus has been on the challenges that trans people and their families have in relation to 'coming out'; including a particularly narrow focus on the adjustment of partners and children (Israel, 2006). When disclosures ('coming out' stories) have been explored in other literature, it has been found that adult children mostly hold positive attitudes toward parents with a trans identity (Stotzer *et al*., (2014). There remains, however, a need for further research on trans parenting to inform a fuller understanding of the experiences and needs of trans parents and their children.

Evidence of cisgenderism can be found in extant literature which suggests the ways in which gender normativity informs both attitudes and social divisions, and the scaffolding of hierarchies through differing levels of acceptance, within the LGBT community. For instance,

a study on attitudes towards LGBT parents by Apperson *et al*. (2015) found attitudes towards gay or lesbian parents were significantly more positive than those towards trans-identified parents supporting the notion of different levels of acceptance within the LGBT population. There have been reports of the difficulties in the transition to parenthood with indicators that such challenges are underscored by gender normative and cisgenderist frameworks around gender roles and notions of family life (Ryan, 2009). As such, within the empirical literature trans parents have reported negative and prejudicial reactions from people who failed to accept their gender and rejected the idea that they were suitable parents (Hines, 2006; Ryan, 2009).

More work needs to be done to explore this, as well as the potential barriers to following a chosen route to parenting. Notwithstanding, the emerging literature explores of a wide range of family-related issues including reproductive and parenting choices (Tornello & Bos, 2017; Riggs & Bartholomaeus, 2018) and the possibility of adopting children amongst trans people (Riggs et al., 2016; Nahata *et al*., 2017; Tornello & Bos, 2017). For instance, a study by Chen *et al.* (2018) found that a high proportion of their sample (70%, *n* = 154) of trans and non-binary young people (aged 14-17 years) reported that they would be interested in adopting in the future. Similarly, a small subset of trans-identified participants in Riggs et al.'s (2016) study (*n* = 18) expressed a strong desire to parent in future; 50% wanted to do so by birth and 50% wanted to adopt. Riggs *et al.* (2016) found that the support a person received from their family of origin was positively correlated with the desire to have children and found the opposite correlation to be the case with negative family responses linked to a person not wishing to become parents themselves. Though findings are preliminary and small-scale, they suggest an important focus for future research.

Critiquing progress in LGBT adoption and fostering

Whilst bearing in mind the problem of collapsing LGBT people into one grouping, there is a dearth of literature on trans adoption and fostering. Therefore, this section attends primarily to advances in fostering and adopt regarding LGBT people more broadly to illustrate the stilted progression for trans people specifically. Notwithstanding, discourse that promotes the inclusion of trans and non-binary people in adoption and fostering practice has increased in recent years, with the publication of US (Perry et al., 2017) and UK guides (Brown et al., 2018) for practitioners, as well as the inclusion of two trans people's narratives within an updated edition of an LGBT adoption and fostering text (Hicks & McDermott, 2018). The inclusion of trans and non-binary carer's stories of applying to be carers after they had transitioned, as well as coming out after becoming a carer, offer insight into the way that services are set up for cisgender applicants and suggest ways in which services can move forward with greater inclusion.

The cisgenderist configuration of services is unsurprising as in 1998 Hicks mapped the discrimination openly voiced about lesbian, gay and single carers in the UK. Social worker and public attitudes held that lesbian and gay families were outside of the norm (exemplifying gender normativity and heteronormativity) and, as such, it was deemed to be unfair to place a fostered or adopted child, who has already experienced stress and a feeling of difference, into an 'unusual' family (Hicks, 1998). The Adoption and Children Act 2002 changed the legal position for adoption and fostering, and subsequently the discourse in this regard. The 2002 Act replaced its 1976 predecessor and made it legal for unmarried

couples to apply together. This meant that many previously excluded couples, who self-defined as LGB or T, were subsequently eligible to adopt as a same-gender couple. Previously adoption and fostering by single people had been allowed since the first legislation in 1926, but only one member of an LGBT coupling could adopt a child (Owen, 1999). The 2002 Act presented the first statutory challenge to the traditional heteronormative ideal underpinning conceptions of 'the family' within fostering and adoption social work (Hicks, 2000; Mallon, 2011).

In 2006, Hicks recognised a wave of cultural change in operation whereby 'stories of impossibility…. [were] being replaced by narratives of opportunity and choice' within the field (Hicks, 2006: 95). Gay men were the focus of Hicks's commentary. It maintains relevance if we reframe to consider the ongoing wave of cultural change and increasing visibility and acknowledgement of rights for trans people. This should be the germination of possibilities for the improved inclusion of trans peoples within the field of adoption and fostering. Indeed, reflecting the wave of cultural change that Hick's referred to there have been increasing numbers of gay couples and single gay people who have successfully adopted since 2005 (DfE, 2016). For example, in the year ending 2018 12% of adoptions by couples in England were to same-sex couples (Dfe, 2018). However, the measure only pertains to couples, not single applicants, identifying as lesbian or gay, and the measures lack tracking of bisexual and trans applicants. In terms of outcomes, contemporary research shows no difference for children whether in lesbian, gay or heterosexual-headed adoptive families (Golombok *et al.,* 2014). Unfortunately, there has not been the same research focus on fostering, therefore statistics are not available in this regard.

Though the wave of change can be viewed as overwhelmingly positive, contemporary research much like that from the previous decade (Goldberg et al., 2007) still suggests that lesbian and gay adopters and foster carers feel they must present themselves in certain ways to legitimise their applications (Wood, 2016). If people are feeling pressure to display their family life within the context of heteronormative cultural scripts, in order to be valued by services, we argue that lesbian and gay carers have not yet equally been accepted.

Data is also lacking to evidence the inclusion of trans people in either fostering or adoption (unless they are part of a same-gender group) (Bachmann & Gooch, 2016; First for Adoption, 2017). It is reasonable to suggest that the number of trans applicants is low compared to cisgender applicants and it is likely that most agencies have no experience of assessing and supporting trans adopters or foster carers (New Family Social, 2018). Moreover, as highlighted earlier, even when research is conducted on LGBT adoption and fostering, trans people are often ignored or there are too few participants included in the sample to provide even tentative findings (see, for example Golombok, 2014). The absence of trans perspectives is even more pronounced when accounting for intersecting minority characteristics. For example, non-White trans people face unique challenges associated with increased levels of discrimination that are even less well attended to in research (Cahila *et al.,* 2003).

Trans people's perspectives on and desires to engage with adoptive parenting and foster care raises different issues and possibilities compared with lesbian and gay parenting. Whilst we have some insights that pertain to adoption (as discussed earlier) data on trans people's

hopes to foster has not yet been collected. Findings illuminating a desire to adopt in the future are of specific import to the analysis presented in this paper as they indicate that a substantial proportion of trans people may consider this pathway to parenting. However, this does not seem to translate into practice as, anecdotally, few trans people pursue adopting or fostering (First4adoption, 2019). This is unsurprising as Riggs *et al*.'s (2016) study suggested that trans people perceive that they have limited pathways to parenting. Further research is needed to explore the barriers to both fostering and adoption.

It may be useful to locate the possibility of trans adopters and foster carers within a broader understanding of how gender as a structure and disciplinary device works in the field. As part of a 'StoryWorks' project by the Fostering Network, Lewis and Boffey (2010) revealed aspects of the narratives of men, who were foster carers, outlining issues in relation to gender roles and the expectations of carers. This is exemplified by Bill, a foster carer who described how: 'a man who devotes his life to caring for children can be treated with suspicion… you are often portrayed as someone to fear, to be wary of, even the abuser' (Lewis & Boffey, 2010: 13). In this project, Lewis and Boffey found that men held concerns about having physical contact with the girls that they cared for (fearing allegations) and that they were not considered to be a valid member of the team around the child. As such, the study reflected gender normative beliefs about who is tasked with primary caring (women) and the role that men should take in this regard (one that is subordinate to the primary carer). The implication of a paradigm such as this is that it problematically sustains the narrow view about who is best to offer parental care and it maintains the absence of trans and non-binary people within the discussion about how to extend the foster carer and adopter population.

Implications for social work practice and research

As discussed, there is a small but emerging body of both quantitative and qualitative research more generally highlighting issues in social work and social care that must be addressed to better meet trans people's needs and wishes (LGBT Foundation, 2017). However, Hudson-Sharp's (2018) scoping review pointed to a dearth of research knowledge on working with trans people in children and family social care more specifically. More targeted reviews of the literature have been unable to identify any published qualitative or quantitative study that focused specifically on adoption or fostering by trans people (Hudson-Sharp and Metcalf, 2016; Hudson-Sharp, 2018).

An important indication, that emerges from existing evidence, is that trans people could be especially well placed to empathise with children and young people who feel misunderstood, who have lacked stability, support and respect from family members in their early years as these are themes reported within trans people's narratives (see Smith, 2010; Serano, 2016). Although these ideas have not yet been explored by primary research, narrative accounts within the existing literature suggest a high level of commitment from trans parents to withstand the challenges that accompany processes of gender questioning, transitioning and developing the resilience needed to continue to offer support to one's children (for example, see Boylan, 2003). We concur with Perry *et al*. (2017) that, based upon more general research into trans people's experiences (James et al., 2015; White, 2013), trans people may have a number of strengths and skills that are valuable to adoption or fostering. These include an ability to navigate rejection, resilience and resourcefulness,

embrace difference and adopt an optimistic outlook that focuses on hope and possibility over limitations. The issues of rejection, resilience and resourcefulness are ones relevant to the backgrounds and characteristics of children and young people who become fostered or adopted.

This paper therefore argues that in the fields of fostering and adoption social work, greater equality can be achieved by improving collaborative working with people who identify as trans or non-binary to understand their personal and social situations from a value perspective most relevant to conducting effective assessment, planning, intervention and review (Smith, 2018). Practice guidance has been produced to assist practitioners to enact the practicalities of an inclusive and collaborative approach in fostering and adoption (Brown et al., 2018). This guidance advocates an approach to working with trans people by using the lens of cisgenderism and heteronormativity. In doing so, it is argued that social workers would be better equipped to understand external obstacles, to see people's strengths and challenge false beliefs, as well as bringing issues into a conscious and open dialogue to be addressed collectively (Morgaine & Capous-Desyllas, 2015).

This paper has already set out the argument that interest in and therefore support for lesbian and gay-headed families may have obscured the persisting neglect of the most marginalised voices because bisexual and trans people are subsumed into 'LGBT' research (Rogers, 2016; 2017b; Ross & Dobinson, 2013). It must also be noted that the experiences of those people whose identity intersects two or more minority categories are markedly absent from the research body (Cahila *et al*., 2003). Therefore, it is recommended that specific research attention is given to the experiences and inclusion of trans people who have a minority ethnic background or have a disability, for instance.

It is suggested that the solution may be cultural change across the social care workforce; a task that could be considered idealist and disregarded by those who adopt a heavily realist and pragmatic stance as being unachievable, at least for the foreseeable future. However, this aim, of full equality, should be held in place while more work is undertaken to understand the field and what needs to change to include trans people more effectively and consistently. In light of the existing evidence-base, future studies need to extricate the experiences of trans people from those of lesbian and gay people to explore their distinct needs and advance their rights and not assume that these are the same as for people from sexual minority categories (Bilblarz & Savci ,2010). Further, knowledge produced from the evidence needs to be translated into accessible practice guidance that practitioners can use in the field to develop inclusive working (Brown et al., 2018).

Conclusion

Despite the calls by researchers working in the field of LGBT adoption and fostering social work for the inclusion of the experiences of trans carers within the research body (see for example, Mallon, 2011), to-date there remains a dearth of trans awareness and knowledge in practice contexts (Hudson-Sharp, 2018). Hudson-Sharp's (2018) scoping review highlighted a patchwork of research knowledge that exposes significant gaps and lacks depth and specificity. Yet our argument begins with a similar premise to Mallon (2011) and Israel (2006), that trans people have been part of family life throughout the centuries, and subsequently they should be included more consistently in providing positive family

experiences to children in need via adoption and fostering processes. The shift to include trans people in all areas of social life is, however, slow, and despite increasing visibility and acknowledge of human rights, recent studies suggest that trans communities still experience social exclusion and discrimination in various aspects of life, including their interaction with the public sector (LGBT Foundation, 2017; Bachmann & Gooch, 2018; Rogers, 2016; 2017a; 2017b).

Finally, this paper begins a critical conversation naming the reasons for trans people's limited inclusion in fostering and adoption social work. We do so by using the lens of cisgenderism. It is hoped that future research, policy and practice will unearth some deeply engrained discourses and norms to remove and illuminate cisgenderist barriers in fostering and adoption social work. This could result in better education for social work practitioners with regard to trans identity and gender diversity, increased inclusion of trans adopters and fosters as well as benefiting the many children and young people who need care, stability and permanence.

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